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## Book Review

### Tibetan Medicinal Plants

Edited by Christa Kletter and Monika Kriechbaum

2001 Medpharm Scientific Publishers, Stuttgart  
51 tables, 46 figures and 415 colour photographs, 383 pages. Hardcover  
ISBN 3-88763-067-X; ISBN 0-8493-0031-2, Price: Euro 138

This book was produced in cooperation by two Austrian universities (Institute of Pharmacognosy, University of Vienna and Institute of Botany, University of Agricultural Sciences, Vienna) and Men-Tsee-Khang (Tibetan Medical and Astrological Institute), Dharamsala, India.

The book starts with a very brief introduction to Tibetan medicine. It is too short to give any real insight into Tibetan medicine, but that is not the role of the book and has been covered by other authors to which references are given. There is also a short well-written section on the types of habitats where Tibetan medicinal plants are collected. One thinks of Tibet as barren mountains, but this is not the case, as the book reveals. Tibetan doctors have more than 10 000 plants at their disposal.

The main part of the book is taken up by the monographs. There are 60 monographs dealing with 99 plants. Each monograph contains the following sections: Tibetan plant classification, Botanical findings, Plant material, Description of the genus and species, Distribution and ecology, Taxonomy and variability, Conservation, the Macro- and microscopic characters of the drug, Chemistry, Pharmacology and Use in Tibetan medicine.

I find it particularly interesting that the authors decided to use the Tibetan plant classification rather than the Linnean system. Each monograph has the Tibetan plant name as the title. In several cases, more than one species, from the same genus or from a completely different family, refer to the same Tibetan plant.

In South Africa we have the same situation, where for example one Zulu name might be used for several botanical species. One starts to wonder whether this should not receive some in-depth research.

The colour photographs of the morphology of the plants are of a varied quality, some are photographs of herbarium specimens, others show the plants in their habitat. The microscopic descriptions are supported by excellent colour photographs of relevant anatomic features prepared specifically for this book.

Although the authors point out that the chemistry and pharmacology sections are not exhaustive, especially for the more well-known plants, references to all researched material is given. For the monographs where several species are treated, comparison of the chemistry and pharmacology of the individual species is particularly useful.

The monograph sections on uses in Tibetan medicine are the most difficult to use for non-Tibetans. The Tibetan word for a particular disease is given which one then has to look up in a glossary to find the equivalent western term for the disease. Although tedious, this is the right way to do it. Any practitioner of Tibetan medicine will immediately know which ailments are described, and it would probably have been difficult to translate it into English; I suspect that several of the conditions are not recognised in western biomedicine.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has written the foreword for this book, and while giving authority to the work, it is also a testament to his wishes of bringing together modern science and traditional Tibetan knowledge.

This is a beautifully presented and well researched book with a wealth of information on Tibetan plants. It is a must for anyone involved in the research of Tibetan medicine, and should be a model for people working on other traditional medicine systems.

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